



Western Counties Regional Library

January 23, 2024

Municipality of Shelburne
414 Woodlawn Drive
PO Box 280, Shelburne, NS
B0T 1W0

Dear Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Western Counties Regional Library Board to express our concerns about the sustainability of libraries and to request an additional 5% in municipal assistance to help maintain regional library services for the upcoming fiscal year.

Decades of inadequate funding and increased pressures has meant that employee wages remain low while community demand continues to rise. Libraries received a moderate funding increase in 2020 and our funding has since remained frozen as per the current funding formula, which will expire March 2025.

This year, our Board made the difficult decision to approve a deficit budget to fund wage increases. This brought the hourly wage for the majority of our frontline staff to \$18.75, which is still well below a living wage. With planned annual cost of living increases and our responsibility to compensate our employees fairly and equitably, we anticipate needing to withdraw \$60,000 from our reserve funds in 2024-2025 to support this increase. We have trimmed the fat in every area from library hours to management positions and there is nowhere else to cut without having it felt throughout the region.

We have advised Minister MacMaster of the Department of Communities Culture, Tourism and Heritage of our current financial situation and the potential for service reductions. Along with all other regional libraries, we have requested a 5% increase in provincial government assistance for 2024-2025 and have asked Minister MacMaster to initiate the Library Funding Formula review process as quickly as possible.

Thank you in advance for considering our ask for a 5% increase in assistance of \$1,700 for 2024-2025. We welcome an opportunity to speak to you and your council about this request and about regional library services. You may contact our Executive Director, Erin Comeau, at director@westerncounties.ca or 902-742-2486 ext. 255 if you are interested in a meeting.

We hope that by working closely with municipal and provincial partners on a funding formula review that we will find ourselves in a more favourable position a year from now.

Yours sincerely,



Sherry Thorburn Irvine
Board Chair, WCRL
Cc Ben Cleveland
Enclosures

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Western Counties Regional Library

Public Library Services Summary

Beyond Books

As Nova Scotians face increased inflationary pressures, housing shortages, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning and overall community well-being, they turn to their libraries for support.

Public libraries are vital to the health of a society. We are responsive to community needs, foster resilience, and are accountable to Nova Scotians. We have the ability to positively affect social determinants of health and well being.

- By providing equitable access to information and technology, we help bridge the digital divide.
- By providing free and welcoming spaces, we counter the epidemic of loneliness and help ease the stress on people who seek warm shelter and access to clean washroom facilities.
- By offering cultural resources, we create a shared sense of community and social cohesion.
- By providing pre-literacy and early literacy programs, we help children build on their reading skills.
- By working with local organizations, we support communities in their growth and development.

In 2023, Western Counties Regional Library (WCRL) experienced a 16% increase over pre-pandemic figures in borrowing alone and 2024 is trending to be even higher than last year. We are facing significant inflation and cost-of-living pressures while responding to more complex community needs.

Aside from our regular services (i.e. materials lending, public computer access, book deposits to seniors residences and regular programs), we highlight the following:

Welcoming and Supporting Newcomers – We welcome new people to the library on a regular basis and build long-lasting connections with them. Newcomers come to the library to use our public computers and Wi-Fi while they wait to establish themselves and their families in the area. Many attend our programs as a way to meet new people and build social connections while some frequent the library just to be in a safe and comfortable space.

Addressing the Digital Literacy Gap – We offer digital literacy programs for people who want to learn to use mobile technology. We emphasize the importance of cybersecurity and aim to equip people with the tools they need to practice online safety while accessing the ever-increasing online government services and assistance programs, including virtual care.

Healthcare workers and local businesses often refer people to the library to get help with booking appointments or registering for customer loyalty cards. All of our branch staff help people with basic computer and internet navigation and walk them through setting up email accounts so that they can access services online.

Support Health and Well-Being – We are distribution centres for COVID-19 Rapid Test Kits and up-to-date information about testing and reporting. We also work with provincial partners to loan out equipment that can gauge home health. These currently include Carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors, radon detectors, and energy meters.

Working with Community - We work closely with community to deliver valuable programs including but not limited to

- Income tax clinics for low-income earners
- Information sessions on tax benefits and scam awareness, chronic pain management, understanding dementia, estate planning and powers of attorney
- Clothing, school supplies and costume swaps with Waste Check and other local organizations
- Science programs with the Discovery Centre and Dalhousie University
- Early literacy programs for children and their caregivers.

West**rn**
Co**unties**
Region**al**
Libr**ary**

Annual Report

April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023

From Our Board



In 2022-2023, with our global Covid pandemic behind us, we recall how our libraries responded in a multitude of ways to meet the needs of community.

Today, while maintaining a focus of libraries as community centres of connection, professional librarians and support staff are also envisioning what future service provision will be. Libraries will continue to remain responsive to the community's needs.

While our unforeseen and unprecedented reality of wildfires have challenged and threatened our communities of Pubnico, Barrington and Shelburne, these communities are transitioning to a new reality.

No matter the external forces, each community will continue to rise to challenges presented and libraries will continue to be a place of connection; a safe, space, inclusive of all. Libraries remain constant and responsive, and they are committed to service and program delivery.

If you are new to community, or you are an old friend of our libraries, I invite you to plug into our social hub, a place of safety and inclusiveness, our anchoring lifeline.

Sherry Thorburn Irvine
Chair

From Our Executive Director

Change and renewal was our theme this year. In the spring of 2022, we, alongside seven other regional libraries in Nova Scotia, launched the Same Page (One) Library Card.

Five years in the making, Same Page enables our patrons to search for and borrow from over one million items with one card and with an easy click of a button.

The response from patrons was immediate and overwhelmingly positive, resulting in a 16% increase in circulation of physical materials over pre-pandemic figures.

With all pandemic restrictions lifted, we renewed old partnerships and quickly developed new ones. Our patrons enjoyed a variety of activities as they gradually became accustomed to being in the library without required masks or distancing.

Excitement and creativity flowed as people enjoyed each other's company while sharing ideas and learning new things.

With the lifting of the pandemic restrictions and the launch of the new library card system, our team felt a renewed enthusiasm for libraries.

We are proud of our accomplishments and are eager to work with community to further develop and refine library services for all to benefit from and enjoy.

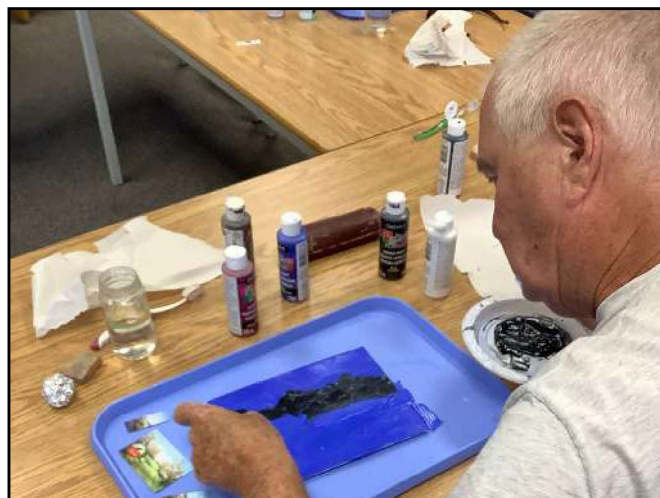


Erin Comeau
Executive Director

Library as Space & Place

“I came (to the library) to scan images of my art. I don’t have a scanner or a photocopier so I know I can come to the library to do this with a USB.”

“I come to the library because I need to use the computer. It’s like a home away from home. I don’t know what I would do without a library in my life because it has been so useful to me in so, so many ways.”



9,192
Active Members



184,875
Items Borrowed



103,499 In-Person
Visits
139,323 Virtual Visits

That’s 651 Visits Per Day



454,805
Digital Loans

Library as Space & Place



The lifting of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions allowed library staff to do more outreach work. Pictured, Training and Development Manager Shannon Raynard is ready to greet the public at the Western Nova Scotia Exhibition in August.

869

Children's
& Adult
Programs.*
Enjoyed by



6,152
People



* Includes passive programs

We help people connect digitally

Older adults in Barrington, Clare, Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth, participated in basic technology skills workshops. They learned to use settings on their tablets and mobile devices and about ways to connect with services and community. They also received tips on Internet safety.



Mahala Sears (standing centre) answers questions during a Discover Your Device workshop with Nick Cook (standing right). The first session taught participants the basics, including how to set up and use key features of their smartphone, tablet or laptop, and how to search the Internet, and download useful applications.

Library as Space & Place

We welcome everyone and share interactions that people have enjoyed over the year

Author readings, paint nights, science clubs, group meditation, art exhibits, LEGO clubs, puzzle exchanges and drop-ins, needle craft afternoons, book clubs, story times, travel and historical presentations.



Carmelita Johnson reads stories by African Nova Scotian author Shauntay Grant as part of African Heritage Month programming.









Participants in a multi-generational Yarn Wall Hanging program get to work at the library.



Jordan Chowen with Canada Revenue Agency's Community Volunteer Income Tax Program discussed tax benefits and scam awareness during a series of workshops in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth in January.

Branches by the Numbers







Barrington

	897 Members
	173 Program Participants
	11,593 Visits
	15,766 Items Borrowed
	673 Computer Bookings
	8,021 Wireless Connection
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
Bay Side Home	
Home Away From Home Family Day Care	
Ocean View Christian Academy	



Families enjoy a painting program at the library in May 2022.

Clark's Harbour

	212 Members
	93 Program Participants
	3,159 Visits
	2,847 Items Borrowed
	84 Computer Bookings
	2,739 Wireless Connections






Clare

	601 Members
	360 Program Participants
	10,989 Visits
	11,187 Items Borrowed
	702 Computer Bookings
	2,881 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
École Stella-Maris	
Foyer Celeste	



Creative programs such as this one on collage are important and popular library programs.

Digby

	1,292 Members
	1,834 Program Participants
	14,041 Visits
	27,483 Items Borrowed
	817 Computer Bookings
	4,478 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
Digby Preschool Co-Op	

Lockeport



304 Members
597 Program Participants
5,139 Visits
9,203 Items Borrowed
345 Computer Bookings
2,708 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

MacLeod Surf Lodge Nursing Home
The Fox and Hare Daycare

Pubnico



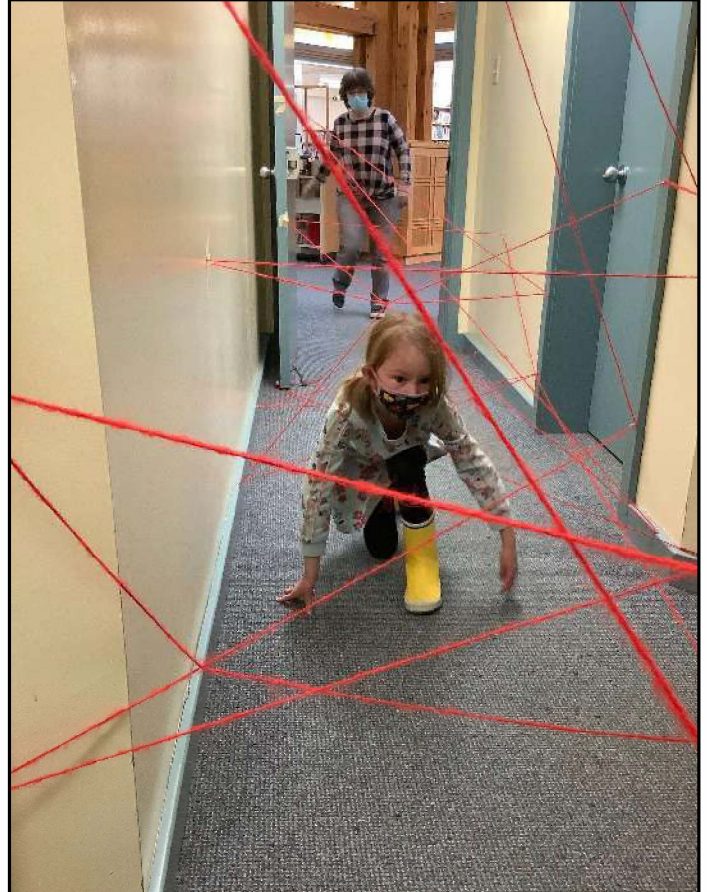
221 Members
19 Program Participants
3,396 Visits
3,235 Items Borrowed
320 Computer Bookings
2,496 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

Nakile Home for Special Care



Children combined their creative skills in technology and art during this library program.



Staff turned the library into a maze that had participants using their athleticism and problem-solving skills.

Shelburne



1,267 Members
1,091 Program Participants
13,442 Visits
26,728 Items Borrowed
994 Computer Bookings
5,208 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

King Street Family Centre
Mary's Abide Awhile Home Limited
Roseway Manor Inc.

Westport









121 Members
240 Program Participants
2,127 Visits
2,779 Items Borrowed
13 Computer Bookings
2,177 Wireless Connections

Outreach & Book Deposits:

School Street Market in Freeport

Weymouth

	705 Members
	457 Program Participants
	7,943 Visits
	12,108 Items Borrowed
	562 Computer Bookings
	3,514 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
Maison Jerome	
Weymouth Consolidated School	









Declan Trefry and father set up Declan's art exhibit. Area artists of all ages exhibit their work at the library's branches in Clare, Digby, Shelburne and Weymouth.



A family follows along during a reading of the works of Shauntay Grant as part of a February African Heritage Month program.

Yarmouth

	3,469 Members
	1,288 Program Participants
	31,670 Visits
	69,620 Items Borrowed
	4,121 Computer Bookings
	9,540 Wireless Connections
<u>Outreach & Book Deposits:</u>	
11 local seniors residences	



Pictured right, Library clerk Marguerite Thibault with students from Weymouth Consolidated School hold up their Smelly Socks bookmarks, created at the library.



A youngster enjoys story time with the library's Lydia Hunsberger at the Western Nova Scotia Exhibition on Aug. 5, 2022.

Making a Difference

Staff help library lover get through some hard luck

Susan Deline has had a string of hard luck, but the library has helped her get through it.

"I can't say enough about library services," she says.

A broken leg followed by a broken hip had kept Deline either hospital- or house-bound from May through much of November.

"I wasn't able to get outside," Deline says.

She praises the work of Digby library clerks Joanna Jarvis and Cindy Hazel.

"Joanna and Cindy have both been wonderful," she says.

"The library has been a lifeline for me," Deline says, adding how being able to read library books helped during her recovery.

Being used to ordering her material online, Deline ordered books from her hospital bed.

A phone call to the library to arrange to have a family member pick up her books changed things dramatically for her.

"Together we made arrangements for her family and friends to come pick up books for her," says Jarvis.

Jarvis told Deline about the library's borrow-by-mail service. The library mails books to the borrower and includes a postage-paid return envelope.

"That was the high point



Library user Susan Deline, right, had high praise for Digby library clerks Joanna Jarvis, left, and Cindy Hazel, not in picture, for their efforts to supply her with books during her recent health challenges.

of the day, getting my library books," she says.

The service enabled her to have part of her normal life back as she could order her books online and have them delivered to her.

And what does she read? While she enjoys a wide range of material, she recently read a biography of Leonard Cohen. The library kept her supplied with a steady stream of British

mysteries and some humour by author Justin Halpern, including *I Suck at Girls* and *Sh*t My Dad Says*.

She recalls laughing out loud in her hospital bed while reading Halpern.

While she was in the Digby hospital, library staff offered to drop books off to her, as it is across the street from the library. Deline turned down the offer as she had family and friends take care of her book deliveries.

The compassion and kindness of the library staff meant a lot to her.

She was able to visit the library in November for the first time since her series of injuries, and was pleased that the library was accessible for her in her wheelchair.

Now, she says she is "getting around pretty good."

She says this is not the first time she has benefited from library services. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, she was homeschooling her grandson and visited the library regularly.

"They (the clerks) were wonderful," she says, offering all kinds of information and guidance on a wide-range of resources available to homeschoolers.

"Boy, did they come through," she says.

Working with the Community

We work with community members and organizations to provide valuable programs and services. Here are some highlights:

- Volunteers with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) Community Volunteer Income Tax Program helped older adults and low-income earners file their income taxes.

- Jordan Chowen with the CRA Community Volunteer Income Tax Program gave presentations in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth on scam awareness and tax benefits.

- The Kespu'kwitk Métis Council celebrated National Indigenous Peoples Day and shared indigenous cultures through, drumming, singing and fire-free smudging.



AI Comeau teaches stories behind pelts, drums and shakers during a National Indigenous Peoples Day program on June 21.

- Dr. Mustafa Abboud, MD, led a program in Digby that introduced participants to mindfulness and meditation/introspection. His focus was on how mindfulness can help reduce anxiety, manage depression, improve focus and symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, and decrease chronic pain and insomnia.

- Dietitian Kaitlyn Comeau, PDt, gave a talk in Clare where she shared tips and tricks on how to shop for healthy foods without breaking the bank.

- Turning the Tide employees Carmelita Johnson and Shawnalynn Cromwell joined the Digby and Weymouth Libraries in their African Heritage Month celebrations by reading from the works of Shauntay Grant.

- Waste Check joined the library in hosting a community Halloween costume swap in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth. The swap provided free shopping for people who needed new costumes and was a good way to divert gently used costumes from the landfill.

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Working with the Community

- Community members in Clare participated in a craft supply swap and all leftover supplies was given to a local senior home.

- The Fibre Group in Westport knitted and crocheted hats, mitts and scarves and donated them to charity as part of a Christmas event led by the group.

- Educators and students from Hillcrest Academy, Weymouth Consolidated School, Lockeport Elementary School, Yarmouth Elementary School and Oceanview Christian Academy visited the library for story times and curriculum based activities.

- Our House Youth Services in Shelburne organized a winter wear swap where people came to the library to donate and/or find good, used winter wear.

- Shelburne County Family Resource Centre, Barrington Municipal Recreation Department and Parents Place (Yarmouth), delivered preschool story times and hosted community playgroups.

- Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia (LISNS) provided information sessions in Digby, Pubnico, Shelburne and Yarmouth on the basics of powers of attorney, personal directives and wills.

- SuperNOVA Dalhousie University led a week-long summer science camp in Shelburne.

- The Discovery Centre visited the Yarmouth Library to host a drop-in-style STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) program for kids and families.

- Sou'West Nova Transit provided free rides to and from library youth and family programs in Shelburne Counties.

- @ NS hired Nick Cook as a technology trainer to provide one-on-one sessions for people who wanted to learn how to use their computers, tablets or mobile devices in Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth.

- The library joined the Crohn's and Colitis GoHere Washroom Access Program, further improving washroom accessibility for people living with Crohn's and Colitis.

- We worked with Nova Scotia Health to distribute COVID-19 rapid test kits and became drop-off sites for people to return their pulse oximeters to Nova Scotia Health.



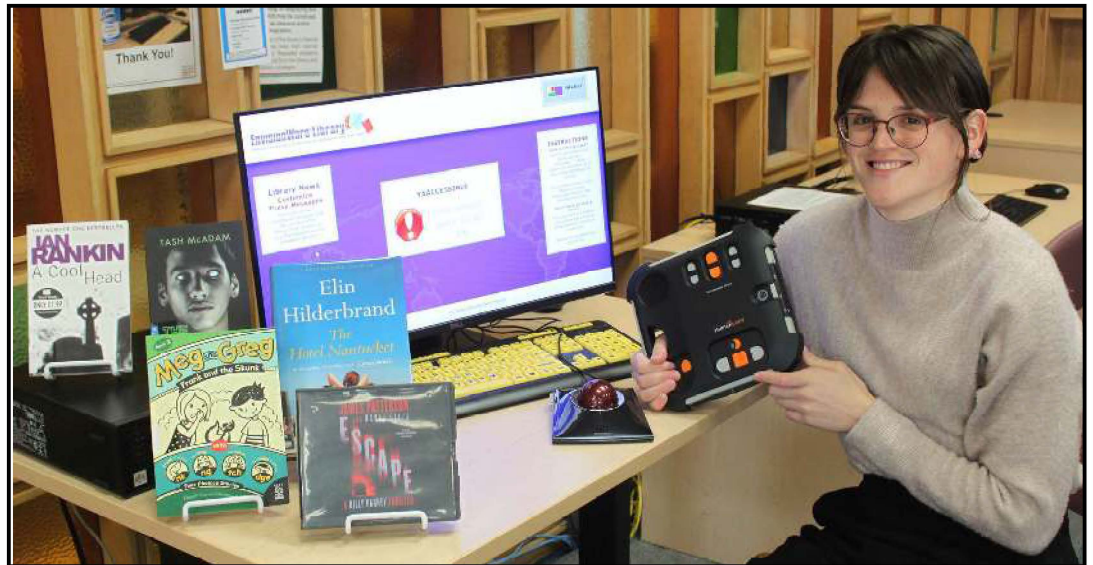
Lots of children and families visited the Discovery Centre's *Winter of Discovery* at the Yarmouth library on Feb. 11.

Becoming More Accessible

We are taking action to become more accessible

We are working towards being fully accessible by the year 2030. Our accessibility plan is available on our website under the Accessibility section.

Accessible public computer stations are now in all of our library branches. These stations each have a 27-inch full HD monitor, large-print keyboard, a specialized trackball mouse, and the Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) voice assistance software.



Lydia Hunsberger of Western Counties Regional Library holds a portable Daisy talking book player next to some of the items and technology available for people with disabilities.

We celebrated International Day of People with Disabilities by promoting materials and services available to people with disabilities. Our booklists featured materials that are written by and for people with disabilities. We also featured materials available to people with visual impairments including, large print books, audiobooks and eBooks, films with descriptive text and captioned videos.

We introduced portable Daisy talking book readers to our collection. Individuals who borrow these readers benefit from their accessibility features, which include speech tone, pitch and speed adjustment and large tactile navigation buttons. Not only can the readers play audiobooks, they can also read a variety of text files including Word documents, text (.txt) XML and HTML. Files can be read from a USB key, SD card or CD.

Our staff help patrons access a wider range of reading materials by connecting them with borrowing services provided by the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS). We also help patrons who are homebound choose materials to be mailed to them via our Borrow-by-Mail service.

We continue to work closely with our municipal and community stakeholders to improve our spaces and services and to make them more accessible to all.

Library Support

People showed their love of Western Counties Regional Library by adopting 974 books during the 2022 Adopt-A-Book campaign from Oct. 1 to Nov. 30. The dollar value of the donations was \$28,840, coming at a critical time for the library as provincial funding is frozen for the next three years. The goal for the campaign was to have 750 new books adopted, valued at \$20,000.

Friends of the library groups in Shelburne and Lockeport continued to purchase items for their library branches and donated \$4,000 and \$700 respectively toward the 2022 Adopt-A-Book campaign.

Businesses continued to support the library's Summer Reading Club, providing prizes for the children's, teen and adult club.

Book sales and regular giving continued to help the library meet its annual fundraising goals.

REGIONAL LIBRARY FINANCES

Expenditures			Revenues		
	2021-2022	2022-2023		2021-2022	2022-2023
Salaries and Benefits	\$1,223,475	\$1,303,094	Province of Nova Scotia	\$1,360,500	\$1,360,500
Library Materials	\$ 190,517	\$ 164,718	Municipalities	\$ 400,013	\$ 447,800
Other Expenses	\$ 445,760	\$ 452,069	Other Revenues	\$ 99,239	\$ 111,581
Total Expenditures	\$1,859,752	\$1,919,881	Total Revenues	\$1,859,752	\$1,919,881



A youngster uses one of the library's Ollies, a robot controlled through an app on a library tablet. The library's technology toys provide a great opportunity to learn while playing.



Siblings enjoy reading in the Yarmouth library courtyard during the summer of 2022.